STRATEGIES OF IMPROVING CHINESE ELEMENTARY AGED CHILDREN'S ENGLISH READING COMPREHENSION

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Abstract

In recent years, the teaching method and strategies used for English language reading comprehension in China have fallen behind. It is crucial to change and improve it. Chinese learners are eager to make more progress in reading comprehension, especially elementary aged students, most of whom lack the skills and motivation necessary for independent learning. For this project, I first distributed a questionnaire to survey Chinese elementary students in different cities and provinces in September. From the data collected, patterns of difficulties were highlighted among learners during the reading process. Most of the difficulties surround close reading, grammar and vocabulary. Focusing on these three main difficulties, I created a workshop and provided three different sample lesson plans. My hope is to help those educators, parents and learners to make progress in reading comprehension.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my family and friends who have encouraged and supported me throughout my graduation studies.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Elena King for her dedication, patience and support throughout my studies and thesis writing process. Also, I would like to thank Dr. Michelle Plaisance for giving us international teachers the opportunity to grow professionally and enrich our exchange experience with the TESOL Master of Arts Degree program. I would like to express my gratitude to the team of professionals for their guidance during my twenty months' study in Greensboro College.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Before I came to the United States, I worked in China as an EFL (English as a foreign language) teacher for more than twenty years. I taught in different schools and in different cities. No matter the middle schools, or the elementary schools where I worked, the students had various degrees of difficulties in English reading comprehension. Currently, although I am working as a Chinese teacher in the U.S, I would like to do some research on the difficulties of the Chinese elementary aged children in English reading comprehension. My hope is to offer some useful strategies or suggestions to the EFL teachers and parents about improving students' reading comprehension ability.

When I was working in the schools in China, I found many students showed little motivation in learning English especially some elementary aged children. Some students complained that they could not understand the texts or books because of their low reading comprehension ability. They had difficulties in their reading comprehension, but they did not know how to resolve the problems. As time went by, they felt it was more and more difficult to learn English. Some students showed less motivation and even wanted to quit English learning. In China, the society attaches more and more importance to English learning in both on-campus and off-campus. The portion of reading comprehension on tests is increasing as the English examination changes almost every year. Some children felt frustrated when they read the passages in their examinations. Some even joked after tests they were "seeing a book from the heaven" which meant they did not understand the passages at all. Many children completed their

reading comprehension part in the tests by guess. It is pressing need to help the children improve their reading comprehension ability.

I am interested in researching strategies and suggestions to help Chinese elementary aged children to increase their English learning motivation and improve their English reading comprehension ability. There is a saying in China, "Motivation is the best teacher." If we want the children to learn something, the first important thing is to motivate them and arouse their interest in it. It is important to do this research because reading comprehension is a necessary skill throughout schooling and a vital component of the successful transition to adult responsibilities. (Graham & Bellert, 2004). This problem is not only my previous and future students', but also many other students'. This project will be beneficial to all the EFL teachers and parents who can help the children with their English learning.

First, I will send an online questionnaire to some Chinese elementary EFL teachers and parents who have elementary aged children. The questionnaire includes basic information of the students, the difficulties they encountered in English reading comprehension, the reasons of this problem, and their suggestions. The teachers and parents will help the students to complete the questionnaire. After collecting the feedback, I will analyze the data from the questionnaire by making some bar charts. I will classify like the kinds of difficulties they have, what they want to improve, the reasons of the difficulties and so on.

From the data collected, I will begin to have an idea of some reasons for the difficulties that Chinese elementary aged students face with English reading comprehension. I would think that there are some normal reasons like the children read very few books, their vocabulary is limited, they are not familiar with the culture of foreign countries, lack of background information and so on. As mentioned in Cain (2006), the vocabulary skills and cognitive ability

are also related to reading comprehension ability, which had impact on the educational attainment. Poor knowledge of grammar rules is also one of the reasons for difficulties in reading comprehension as the children cannot understand long sentences. I have some assumptions about whether students' own character influence their reading comprehension or not as well. Lack of motivation is also one of the important reasons.

After demonstrating the reasons, I will create a workshop to work out and explain some strategies I think they are useful in ESL classes. I will offer some teaching plans as examples to explain and how to use these strategies such as phonological awareness instruction (Yeung, 2013), direct instruction, strategy instruction, combination instruction, modeling, support and guiding instruction, attributional feedback, practice according to the text type, and make adjustment according to students' progress, (Klingner, 2015) and so on. Increasing students' motivation is also important in improving their reading comprehension ability. I will discuss the importance of motivation and how to motivate the students as well. Effective classroom-based instructional approaches can also boost students' motivation to read and their reading comprehension. Teachers can use a variety of narrative and informational material to motivate the students in class (Wigfield et al., 2016). No matter what kind of strategies we use in our class, we need to consider the class size, learning objective, students' ages, the text style, background knowledge and some other basic information.

In my opinion, this research will benefit both teachers and parents, not only me, but also all the other teachers around the world who teaches English as a second language or a foreign language. The parents who guide their children in English reading can also get some useful strategies from my project.

The project also benefits my future students and all the other English learners who struggle with English reading comprehension. Hope the result of my research can enhance their English learning motivation and improve their reading comprehension ability. They can also achieve good results in their tests.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Reading is challenging for many language learners, especially those who know the individual words separately, but fail to understand their meaning when those words are linked together (McNamara, 2007). If they meet a topic that is unfamiliar, technical, or complicated, the learners may feel frustrated (McNamara, 2007). Reading comprehension is a central importance for success in any language learning (Clarke et al., 2013). For English as the second language or foreign language in China, more and more teachers and parents are aware that reading comprehension is the basic of English learning. How to improve the learners' reading comprehension ability becomes an important part in English language teaching classes. Since the students start to learn English in kindergarten or elementary schools in China, reading comprehension appears particularly important in their whole-life English language learning. Reading comprehension is not a single step or skill, it is a long time to accumulate words and understand the sentence meanings. It is also hard for educators to teach in classes and for learners to improve their reading comprehension in only one lesson. Reading comprehension is a complex process which includes thinking, teaching, past experiences and background knowledge (Prado & Plourde, 2005). Without those elements, it is not easy for the learners to understand. There are many different theories and strategies for the teachers to use in their reading classes, which have been verified by peers.

To examine the importance of improving Chinese elementary aged students' reading comprehension ability in their English learning, first I will explain what reading comprehension

is and the importance of reading comprehension in English language learning. Next, I will provide several factors which influence reading comprehension ability. Then I will demonstrate some strategies to motivate students and improve students' reading comprehension ability like the vocabulary teaching instruction and other reading instruction. Finally, I will discuss the challenges that teachers may encounter in their reading comprehension classes.

What is reading comprehension?

Reading comprehension is the process by which people understand the written materials they read (Kirby, 2007). In this process, the reader accesses the articles, integrates their own background knowledge, and understands their meaning.

Any language conveys meaning and shares information, ideas, and views (Clarke et al., 2013). Written language can bring the readers' mind to different places, times and events which is an enjoyable experience for the reader (Clarke et al., 2013). But for many children, it is not enjoyable when they are reading because they do not understand. Reading comprehension is a skill that inputs listening and speaking comprehension to text (Kirby, 2007). Gough and Tunmer (1986) regarded reading comprehension as the combination of decoding and listening comprehension. As we all know, the history of oral comprehension of human being is much longer than reading comprehension because the written language was created much later than the oral language. Reading comprehension is more challenging, requires vocabulary and background knowledge (Kirby, 2007). And it also needs deliberate instruction (Kirby, 2007). There are several different levels of reading comprehension. It is important to understand the different levels and how these levels interact (Kirby, 2007).

The factors that influence reading comprehension

Reading comprehension is a flexible and ongoing cognitive and constructive process (Woolley, 2011). Narvaez (2002) provided that at least five things influence reading comprehension in constructivist reading research which are reader skills, reader knowledge, reader cognitive development, reader culture, and reader purpose.

Researchers found that different people have different views or opinions after they read the same written material because they have different reading skills and background knowledge (Long et al., 2008). Readers with more reading skills and background knowledge have more and deeper level of comprehension with the articles (Moravcsik & Kintsch, 1993). Narvaez (2002) thinks if the reader lacks the prior knowledge of the article, it is easy to misunderstand or misinterpret the article. Cain and Oakhill (2006) concluded vocabulary skills and cognitive ability have impact on students' reading comprehension ability after their investigation about 102 children aged 7 to 8 years on specific reading comprehension difficulties.

Narvaez (2002) also believed that the more or wider the readers' concerns expand, the more and more the readers consider others. After research, Narvaez (2002) examined there is quite a difference between younger and older readers in terms of the themes of moral stories reading comprehension. The differences of their cognitive development are significant.

The same as background knowledge, cultural knowledge also influences reading comprehension. Narvaez (2002) concluded that cultural-ideological background can influence reading comprehension which often transpire without awareness.

Different reading purposes play a critical role in reading comprehension process too. There are two normal reading categories which are reading for school purposes and reading for entertainment. Readers feel school reading is less interesting than entertainment reading in

Narvaez's (2002) article. They engage in rereading and evaluating the text with a study goal which is different from a fun or relaxed goal. The readers perform different in reading comprehension.

Reading motivation

Wigfield (2004) believes engagement in reading is crucial for the development of long-life literacy learners. In Wigfield's (2004) book, the author demonstrates CORI (Concept Oriented Reading Instruction) which is a unique, classroom-tested model to promote reading engagement. This instruction not only supports for student motivation, but also combines reading strategies and background knowledge. The CORI program fosters students' reading engagement and comprehension through teaching reading strategies in class. And it also motivates the students' intrinsic reading comprehension.

Reading motivation plays an important role in students' reading achievement and school success (Guthrie et al.,2006). Especially for students in Grade 3 to Grade 5, researchers proved that reading motivation is differentiated from motivation in other subjects which can facilitate students' achievement on standardized tests (Gottfried, 1985) and school grades (Sweet et al., 1998). Teachers can use situational motivation to encourage students to develop long-term reading interest (Guthrie et al.,2006). The authors found using stimulating tasks in class can increase students' situational interest, like hands-on science observations and experiments, which increases longer term intrinsic motivation and reading comprehension (Guthrie et al.,2006). They investigated and found motivation-enhancing instructional practices in class influence reading motivation and increase reading comprehension.

Researchers found reading motivation tends to differ by gender, ethnicity, ages and other factors (Wigfield et al., 2016). Wigfield et al., (2016) also offered some effective classroom-based instructions to motivate reading among children of different grades. Teachers know that motivation is the heart of learning (Gambrell, 1996). It is critical for the teachers to create a classroom culture to foster reading motivation (Gambrell, 1996). Gambrell suggests that the classroom can be full of books which have opportunities for the students to choose, and the teacher leads an explicit reading model which reflects the value of reading and sharing a love of reading with students.

Wigfield et al., (2016) said reading motivation is associated strongly with reading outcomes, such as students' reading comprehension, use of effective reading strategies and grades. Different levels of perceived competence, perceived autonomy and students' goals influence the students' reading comprehension. Wigfield et al., (2016) suggested teachers and other educators should enhance students' reading motivation in school. They can increase students' reading motivation and engagement by using instructional practices, which help the students to build their self-efficacy and foster their autonomy over learning.

Vocabulary teaching strategies

Researchers found that receptive and expressive vocabulary knowledge influence pre-reading skills in differential ways (Wise et al., 2007). Expressive vocabulary knowledge facilitates word recognition skills (Wise et al., 2007), thus further prompts reading comprehension.

Yeung et al (2013) investigated the effects of phonological awareness instruction on kindergarten aged second language learners. In this study, the researchers divided the students

involved in this experiment into instructional group and comparison group. Some researchers trained all the participating teachers about linguistic skills, English phonology, phonetics and phonological awareness in the beginning, then the teachers had activities in class and observed the students' performances. During the three months, the researchers collected data weekly by receiving feedback from the teachers. They analyzed the data by four tables about demographic characteristics, means and SD by groups. The researchers concluded that the phonological awareness instruction in class is beneficial for Chinese ESL students to acquire the second language reading and spelling skills (Yeung et al. 2013). So this instruction is also good for reading comprehension.

Ash and Baumann (2017) explained four evidence for the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension which are descriptive analyses, correlational studies, examinations of readability and achievement test data. Effective vocabulary instruction in class may prompt students' reading comprehension. Ash and Baumann (2017) also offered four vocabulary teaching strategies which are providing rich and varied language experience, teaching individual words, teaching word-learning strategies and fostering word consciousness. Those vocabulary instructions enhance students' vocabulary learning and appreciation as well as their reading comprehension (Ash &Baumann 2017).

Effective reading strategies to improve reading skills

Reading strategies and reading skills are like the two faces of the same coin (Manoli & Papadopoulou, 2012). Teaching reading strategies in class is a key element in developing students' reading comprehension (Küçükoğlu, 2013). Thus, designing and teaching effective reading strategies are very important to the teachers. The teachers need to be well prepared

before their classes, then they can help their students to improve their reading comprehension through effective reading strategies (Küçükoğlu, 2013).

Küçükoğlu (2013) studied fourteen students of intermediate level in reading courses, then provided six effective reading strategies to improve reading skills which are predicting, visualizing, making connections, summarizing, questioning and inferring. Küçükoğlu (2013) found those students made progress in reading comprehension after they were taught about the reading strategies. Rraku (2013) concluded that reading strategies instruction increase students' reading comprehension greatly and the improvement is noticeably in both reading and language learning. It is important to teach reading strategies to enable the students to use them consciously.

Reading comprehension instructions

Reading comprehension provides the basis for a substantial amount of learning in schools (Alvermann & Earle, 2003; Kirsch et al., 2002). Spo¨rer et al., (2009) investigated the effects of three different forms of strategy instruction on 210 elementary-school students' reading comprehension. In this investigation, the researchers assigned the students any of three intervention conditions and a traditional instruction which is the control condition. Four reading strategies which are summarizing, questioning, clarifying and predicting were taught to students and practiced in small groups which is reciprocal teaching, pairs, or instructor guided small groups. The result shows that the students who practiced reciprocal teaching in small groups outperformed students in instructor-guided and traditional instruction groups on a standardized reading comprehension test.

Reading comprehension research has a long and rich history (Duke & Pearson, 2009). Research has made a lot of progress since 1975. Duke and Pearson (2009) believe "those who study reading comprehension instruction have avoided much of the acrimony characteristic of work in other aspects of reading unlike decoding, oral reading and reading readiness" (p.205). They think "good comprehension instruction includes both explicit instruction in specific comprehension strategies and a great deal of time and opportunity for actual reading, writing, and discussion of text" (Duke & Pearsons, 2009, p.207). The components in our approach to balanced comprehension instruction are a supportive classroom context and a model of comprehension instruction (Duke & Pearson, 2009). Duke and Pearson (2009) also demonstrated several important features of good reading instruction. These features are:

> a great deal of time spent actually reading, experience reading real texts for real reasons, experience reading in the range of text genres that we wish students to comprehend, an environment rich in vocabulary and concept development through reading, experience, and above all discussion of words and their meanings, substantial facility in the accurate and automatic decoding of words, lots of time spent writing texts for others to comprehend, and an environment rich in high quality talk about text (pp.207-208).

Duke and Pearson (2009) provided five components of the model of comprehension instruction which are "an explicit description of the strategy, modeling of the strategy in action, collaborative use of the strategy in action, guided practice using the strategy and independent use of the strategy". They also reminded the readers that "another important role for the teachers in implementing this model is in choosing the texts to use". Duke & Pearson (2009) mentioned "comprehension instruction should be companied by ongoing assessment as with any good instruction".

Van & Verhaeghe (2005) researched “the effectiveness of explicit reading comprehension strategies instruction”. The participants are 2nd and 5th graders who practiced in teacher-led whole-class activities (STRAT), reciprocal same-age peer-tutoring activities (STRAT+SA), or cross-age peer-tutoring activities (STRAT+CA). The result showed “among those who finished the program, 5th graders in the cross-age peer-tutoring activities condition reported significantly fewer negative thoughts related to their reading proficiency”. “The strategy of peer tutoring has been successful in a variety of age groups and curriculum areas like reading comprehension” (Van & Verhaeghe, 2005).

Salataci (2002) investigated how reading strategies effect reading instruction in reading in both Turkish and English. The results indicated that strategy instruction had a positive effect on both languages reading strategies and reading comprehension in English. Salataci (2002) provided and discussed some reading strategies instruction which is beneficial for the students’ reading comprehension such as think-aloud method, reciprocal teaching, the semantic mapping, the experience-text-relationship (ETR) method and so on, especially ETR method which is useful to activate students’ background knowledge.

Guthrie et al., (2004) investigated an instructional framework of combining motivation support and strategy instruction (Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction-CORI) influenced reading outcomes for third graders which was based on an engagement perspective of reading development. The results showed the students in CORI classrooms achieved better performances than other students on measuring of reading comprehension, reading motivation and reading strategies who are only in Strategy Instruction (SI) groups or Traditional Instruction (TI) groups. Guthrie et al., (2004) concluded that the motivational practices with CORI are responsible for the improvements in students’ motivation, reading comprehension, and cognitive strategy use.

Challenges

Noll and Lenhart (2013) discussed two all-too-common challenges during reading instruction in class which are filling curriculum gaps and ensuring systematic instruction of essential skills. They demonstrated that there is no substitute for strong teacher preparation that develops the knowledge and reading skills.

In elementary schools, it is a common instructional practice to separate the students into homogeneous groups during reading instruction (Kemper 2020). After long time research, many researchers found grouping is an effective and equitable instructional practice. The main challenge in estimating the effects of grouping is determining an appropriate comparison case for homogeneously grouped students. Kemper (2020) concluded homogeneously grouped students have slightly higher reading growth than students who are not grouped. And the author also found that this association between homogeneous grouping and reading growth depends on students' reading group placement and initial reading skills.

Conclusion

The main aim of reading is to understand what we read (Cain, 2005). Cain (2005) thinks the young readers need to acquire fluent and accurate word reading skills before reading. Decoding skills support reading comprehension (Perfetti et al., 1987), but good word reading alone does not guarantee adequate reading comprehension (Cain, 2005). Cain (2005) demonstrated the skills to develop to a successful comprehender which are word-level knowledge, sentence-level knowledge, discourse-level knowledge and memory and general knowledge.

Thorndike (1976) found two background factors influenced the students' reading achievement. One is the family socioeconomic like parental occupation and education, the other is the reading resources at home like the numbers of books, magazines and other reading materials in the home and the availability of a dictionary.

There are many different factors impacting the children's reading comprehension. Researchers keep researching the reasons and the strategies to improve language learners' reading comprehension in different areas.

Chapter Three: Project Design

In this chapter, I intend to explain the rational for creating a workshop for EFL elementary teachers in China who struggle in reading comprehension instruction and the parents who want to help their children to improve their reading comprehension ability. The workshop will also assist the English language learners in China who struggle in reading comprehension.

There are four basic skills of English as a second or foreign language learning which are listening, speaking, reading and writing. Language learners pursue the improvement of comprehensive English proficiency. However, in non-English-speaking countries, like China, the learners lack the actual environment for language learning, which is not conducive to the development of listening and speaking skills. Therefore, reading has become an effective way to foster language sense and accumulate English learning experience. English reading is an important means to develop English learning motivation and improve English language level.

English reading ability is the basis for other development (Bayat et al. 2014). There are several aspects showing the promotion effect of reading in English learning. English reading is an important means to improve English learning motivation and increase knowledge. As reading more and more, the language learners can acquire more knowledge, gain more experience and broaden their horizons (Wang, 2020). At the same time, the learners can improve their ability of logical thinking, abstract inference and understanding ability. English reading can also cultivate and enhance students' sense of language. It is very important for the learners to have language sense which determines the authenticity of the language use. The language sense cannot be

formed in a short time. It is usually formed from long-term language practice, and reading is a good way to form it. Reading can help improve writing as well. Leung (2002) suggested that extensive reading can enhance vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension and promote a positive attitude toward reading. In China, we have a very famous saying: “ample reading produces fluent writing” which reveals the important relation between reading and writing. Reading can help the students know more about other cultures. From English articles and books, the language learners can get more background knowledge about history, local customs, religious beliefs and cultures in other countries and districts.

As we all know, plenty of reading is required in any language learning, and English is no different. Proficient English learners have read quite a lot of books in English. Recently, learners and their parents have been paying more and more attention to reading during their language learning. In China, reading comprehension questions have appeared in larger numbers across different kinds of English proficiency tests. However, most of the English (EFL) teachers in China still use the main teaching method which is asking the students to memorize a lot of words and grammar rules, and typically reading example texts only to do huge amounts of after-reading exercises. Those kinds of method and practice occupy most of the time of the students. Often students do not improve much in their English learning using these methods. On the contrary, many of them have lost their English learning motivation. There is a problem with this traditional teaching method, and educators should pay more attention to language competence than mastery of the language knowledge. Many EFL teachers lack the preparation and expertise, but teacher preparation and expertise are part of the equation (Gándara et al.,2005). It is urgent to change the teachers’ reading teaching method.

There are four sections in this project. First is a questionnaire. Since I started my project in August, I distributed many pieces of questionnaire online to the elementary students and EFL teachers in China. In that survey, I asked the students about the difficulties they met during their reading comprehension and their suggestions including the teachers' instruction. Second is data collecting and analyzing. After collecting all the questionnaires, I analyzed the data from the survey in different charts. Third is the workshop which provides several strategies to improve students' reading comprehension ability. The reading instructions aim at the difficulties elementary students met in their reading comprehension. I will focus on the students' vocabulary, background knowledge and reading skills. Last is the challenges the teachers face in English reading class. This project offers a resource which will be beneficial to both the teachers and the language learners. The teachers can access some activities and instructions that can be used in their classroom like book reading and related activities which can promote the development of language and literacy skills in young children (Wasik & Bond, 2001). The students can learn some skills to improve their reading comprehension ability and select some strategy to overcome any temporary roadblock they might encounter in their reading (Afflerbach et al., 2008).

Chapter 4: Final Project

In recent decades, it is more and more popular for students to learn English as a second language or a foreign language in China. English has been one of the compulsory subjects in all China primary education schools in recent years. Since there is no English-speaking environment for the Chinese learners, many of them are struggling with English reading comprehension especially the elementary aged students. The present project provides supports to those educators and learners who need to improve their reading comprehension both in class and after class.

The beginning of the project: Questionnaire

I posted the questionnaire survey on WeChat which is a mainstream social application on September 26, 2020. The link of the survey is: https://www.wjx.cn/jq/92260190.aspx Below is the translation of the questionnaire:

English Reading Comprehension Survey

Dear students, this questionnaire only provides the basis for my master graduation paper. The results of the survey are confidential, will not have any negative impact on you. There is no right or wrong answer in the questionnaire. Please answer truthfully and do not be influenced by others. I just want to know what you really think about English reading comprehension. I hope you will examine the topic carefully and think independently. Thank you very much!

1. What grade are you in?

   A. 1st grade

B.

B. 2nd grade

C. 3rd grade

D.4th grade

E. 5th grade

F. 6th grade

2. Your character is:

   A. Extrovert, cheerful, outgoing

   B. Introvert, silent

   C. Neutral, ambivert

   D. Others_____

3. Do you understand the English articles in your test paper?

   A. Yes, I do.

   B. Part of them.

   C. No, I don't.

4. Do you like reading all kinds of articles in English? The articles are in English newspaper, magazines, websites or original English books.

   A. Yes, I enjoy reading those.

   B. No, I don't like them.

   C. I have never read them.

5. Do you often read English articles or original books in your spare time?

   A. Quite often.

   B. Not often.

C. Never.

6. The difficulty for you to have in reading English articles is: (multiple choices)

   A. Insufficient vocabulary

   B. Have difficulties to understand some sentences in the articles

   C. Complicated sentence structure

   D. Low reading speed

   E. Low understanding rate

   F. Insufficient background knowledge

   G. Bad reading habit and method

   H. Other reasons_____

7. The reason why you think your English reading comprehension test grades are not satisfactory is: (multiple choices)

   A. Too many new words.

   B. The article is too long.

   C. Don't understand the questions of the quiz.

   D. Read too slow.

   E. Lack of reading skills.

   F. Lack of interest in reading.

   G. Other reasons_____

8. Your vocabulary barriers in English reading are: (multiple choices)

   A. Too many new words, affect the understanding of the main idea and details of the article

B. There are some new words, which do not affect the understanding of the main idea of the article, but affect the understanding of details

C. Upset when encountering new words, and lose interest and confidence in reading]

D. Others _____

9. What are the reading comprehension problems and topics that are difficult for you? (multiple choices)

A. Advertisements and stories

B. News

C. Science and technology

D. Paper or thesis

E. Others_____

10. Do you have any thoughts or suggestions about English reading comprehension? (Include teaching reading in class)

_____

_____

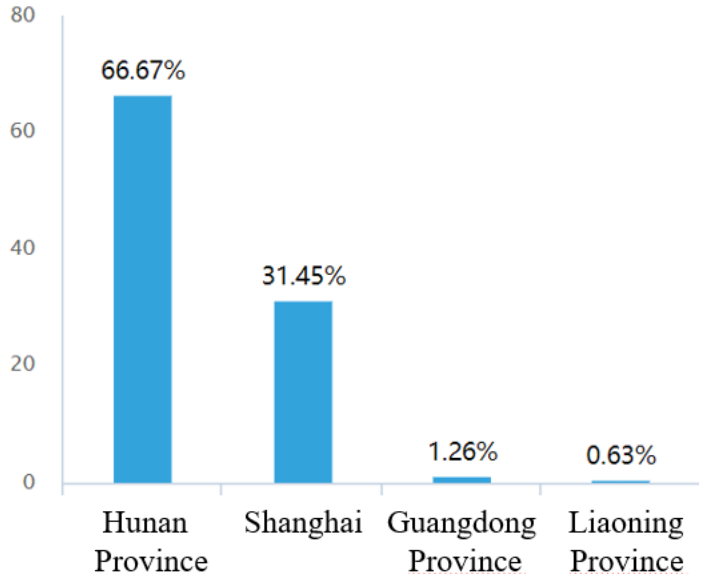
My friends or ex-colleagues who have elementary aged children in their families and who work in elementary schools asked their children or students to complete the questionnaire survey. All the participants were anonymous. I cut off the survey after two weeks at which point I had 159 completed questionnaires.

Results

There were ten questions in this survey including 9 multiple choices questions and 1 open-ended question. The first two questions are about the students' personal questions which

are their grades and characters. The students who participated are all in elementary schools from first grade to sixth grade. From the data collected, they are from four different provinces and municipalities in China which include both developed areas and developing areas. Normally the students in developed areas like Shanghai and Guangdong province have a higher English level than those in developing areas. They have more and better resources for language learning because of the developed economic and education condition.

Table 4.1: location of the participants



In this survey, more students selected that they have extrovert and neutral personalities than introvert personality. Two students chose “others” and wrote that their personalities varied depending on performing in front of different persons and different moods. Based on the survey, extrovert students like reading in English more than other personalities, too. Almost half of the outgoing participants like reading English books or articles. The data also showed that the percentage of introvert and unexplained students who have never read English articles is higher than the other personalities. But there is no obvious evidence to show that there is some relationship between the personality and their interest of reading in English. In Table 4.4, we can

see more extrovert students understanding English articles or books than other students, only 1% of extrovert students do not understand English articles. From the data, we can see extrovert participants perceive that they have better reading comprehension ability than others.

Table 4.2 personality of the participants

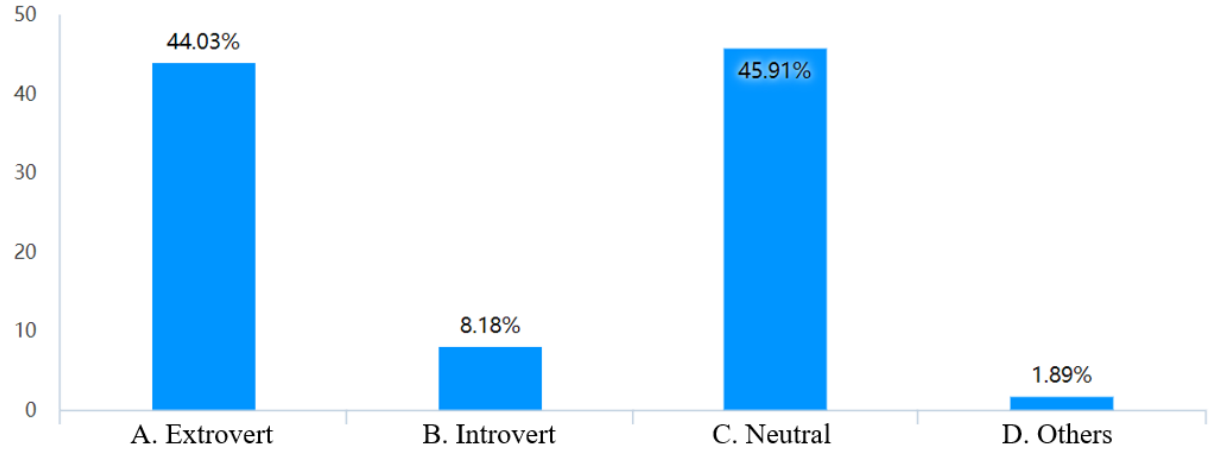


Table 4.3 personalities and reading English articles or books

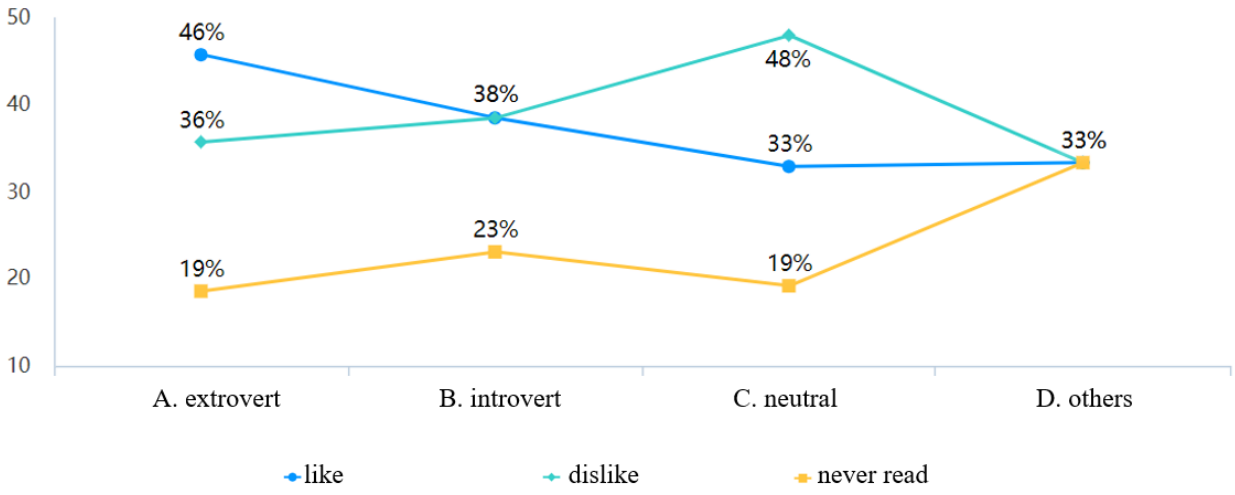
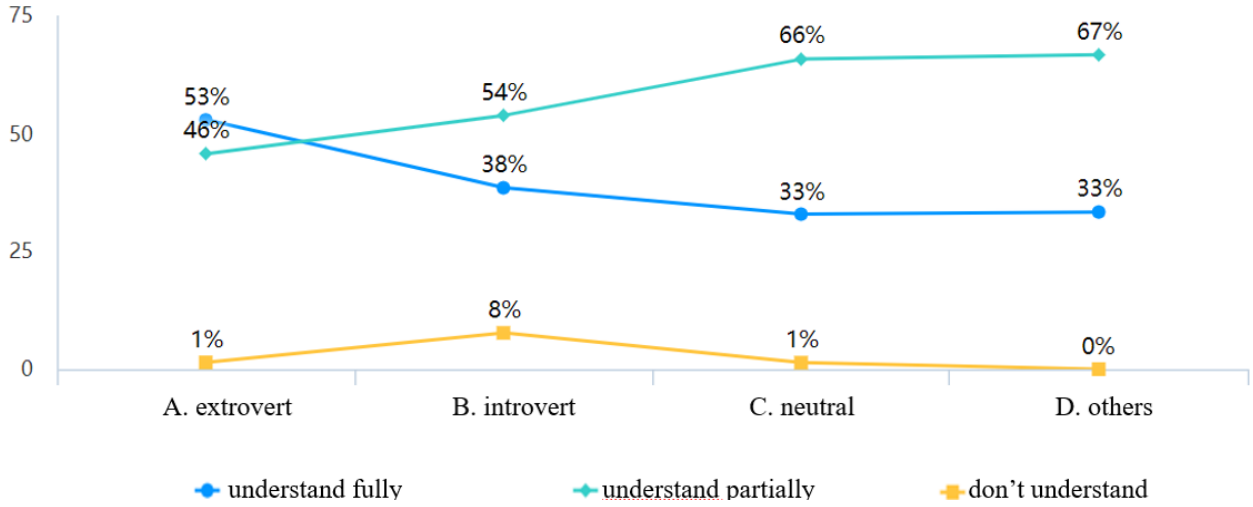


Table 4.4 personalities and understanding English articles or books



From all the participants' feedback, I found almost half of them do not like reading English articles or books. Most of them do not read in English often in their spare time. Some of them even have never read English articles or original books. They live in a non-English speaking environment and their goal of learning English is to pass the tests and get good grades, rather than mastering the language. The elementary students' spare time is always occupied by many after-school classes. There is not enough time for them to read Chinese books, not to mention English. As we all know, if we learn a new language, reading plays a very important role in our learning. Lack of reading is also a reason leading to reading comprehension difficulties. In fact, it is easy to access English articles or original books in their daily life in recent years. They can read books from the library or websites, no matter they live in the developed area or developing area.

Table 4.5 like reading English articles or books

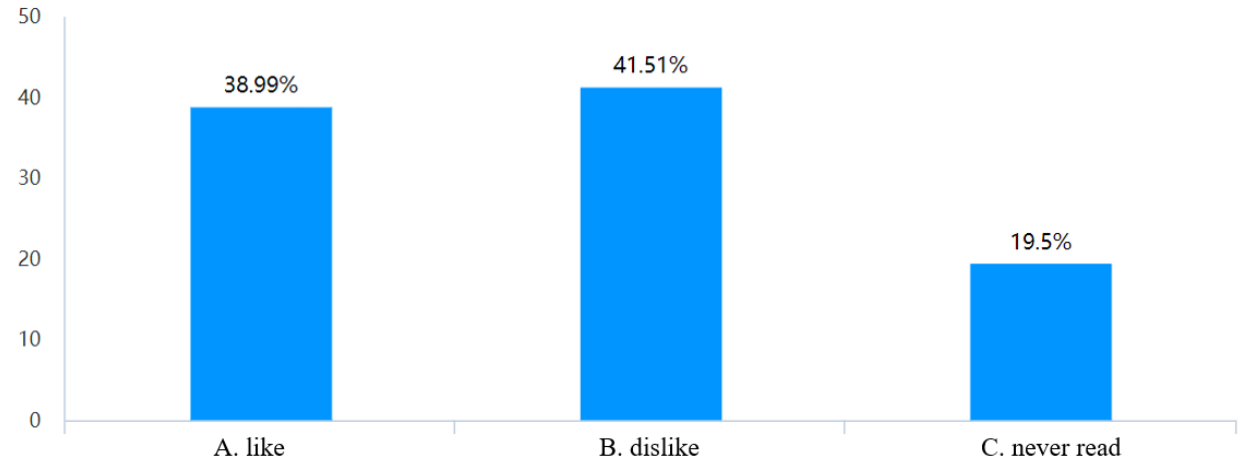
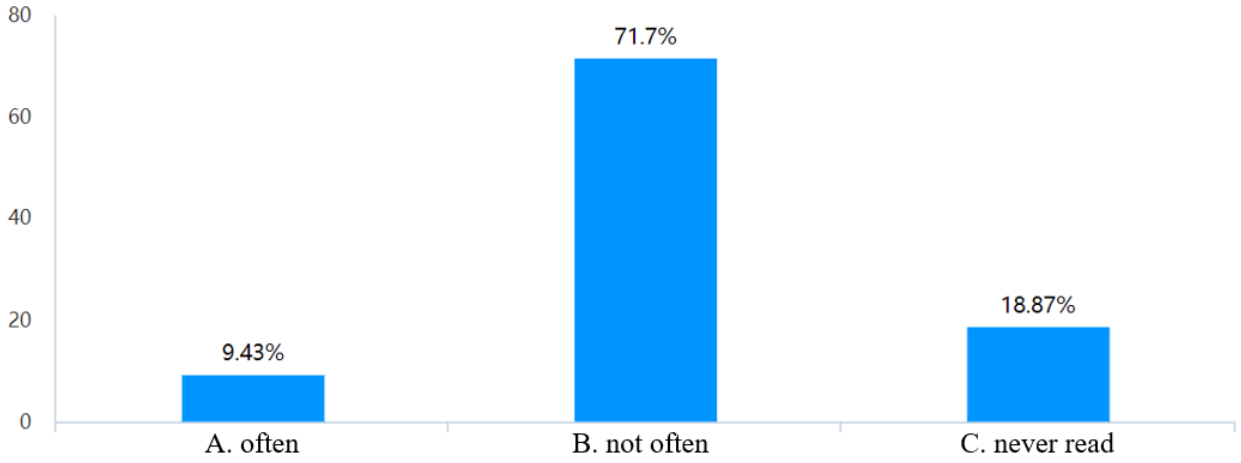


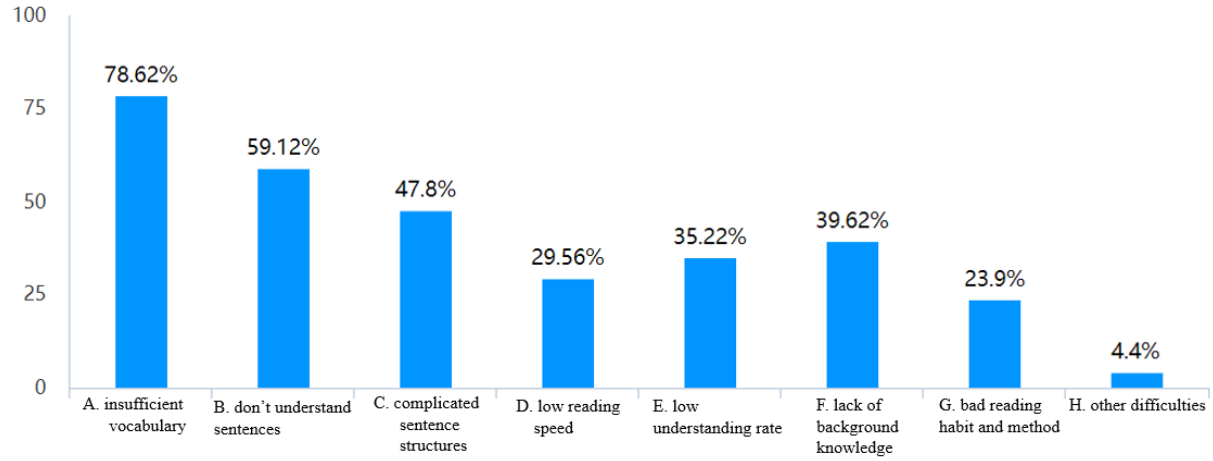
Table 4.6 read English articles or books in spare time



From the survey, I found insufficient vocabulary is the top reason of having reading comprehension difficulties. Almost eighty per cent of the participants have this problem. They think too many new words make it difficult to understand the articles and fail to achieve good grades. The other top reason is about grammar. A lot of Chinese students dislike learning grammar through rote memorization. Memorizing vocabulary and studying grammar are the two main ways for the Chinese students to learn English. In fact, it is very boring to learn those without reading. The best way to memorize new words and learn grammar is by reading. But most of the Chinese students do not know this way. It is frustrating for them when they cannot

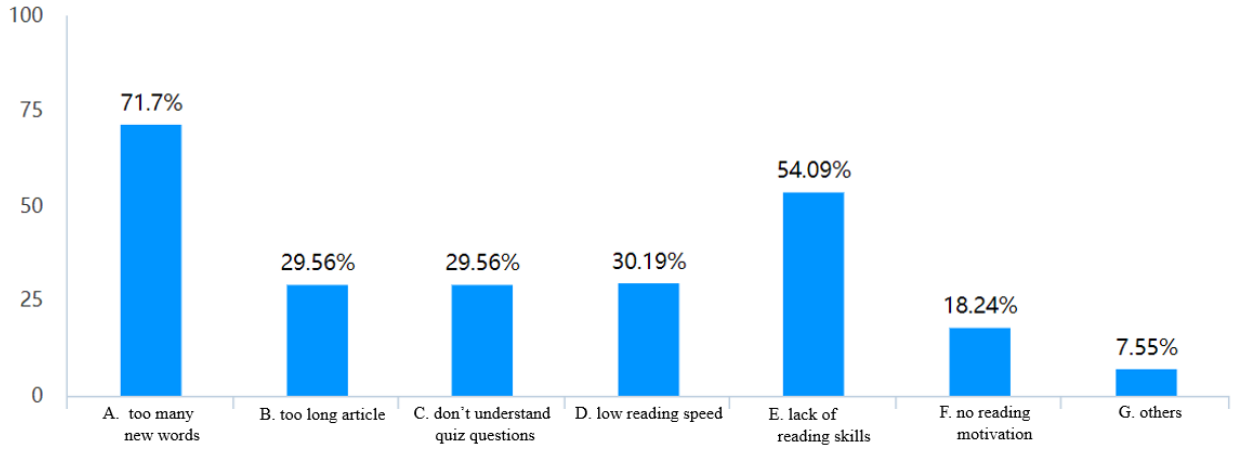
understand English articles or books. Thus, it is a vicious circle. There are some other reasons leading to their reading comprehension difficulties like bad reading habits, few reading skills, insufficient background knowledge and so on. Three students chose the last option and commented, but their difficulties were all about grammar too.

Table 4.7 difficulties in English reading comprehension



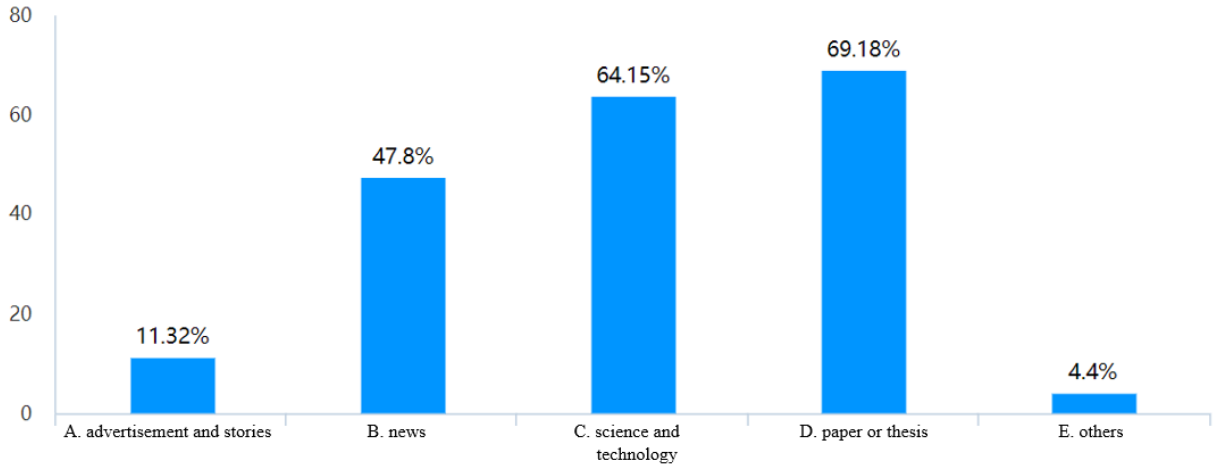
There are another two questions about their reading comprehension difficulties in their reading tests. The students had the same top reason which is too many new words. When they encountered new words, many of them stopped and felt upset, then lost interest and confidence in reading. The elementary aged students also were lacking reading skills. They read very slow, some even read word for word. Sometimes they know the meaning of each word, but do not understand the whole sentence. They often lose patience gradually if the articles were too long for them. I found the students have almost the same difficulties and reasons when they read normally in their spare time and complete reading tests. Insufficient vocabulary is the top reason and the top problem that needs to be solved.

Table 4.8 the reason of unsatisfied reading test results



Most of the students who participated in this survey think that papers or theses are the most difficult type of text to read. Second, were science and technology articles, then news. Of course, the advertisement and stories are the easiest topic to read and understand. There are many different channels of English news on TV and internet in China. The Chinese students can try to watch videos and read news online for a few minutes every day, then they can accumulate their vocabulary and background knowledge. It is a good way to do learn a new language.

Table 4.9 difficulties in different types of reading



In the end of the survey, I set an open question to ask for their suggestions or thoughts about reading comprehension including teachers' instruction in class. Most of the students were aware of the necessity of reading more original books. They also think improving their vocabulary is also one of the most pressing issues. Because of too much assignment after school, the students do not have enough time in reading. They hope to read more after class both in Chinese and English. Since it is an open question, some of the participants complained their English reading class were very boring. The teachers only translated the articles for them and did not motivate them, the students do not like this kind of English class. They like English native speakers' class which is more active and fun.

Sample Lesson Plans

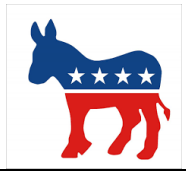
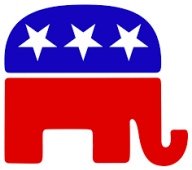
From the data collected in this survey, I found the points that most influenced the students' reading comprehension were vocabulary and grammar. The students do not like a stereotypical reading class; on the contrary, they want an active English reading class. The teachers must motivate the students in class and arouse their interest in reading. Thus, I provide three different sample lesson plans of reading comprehension, grammar and vocabulary for different aged elementary students. These lesson plans have been designed with activities and recourses which enlarge students' vocabulary and promote students' reading comprehension ability.

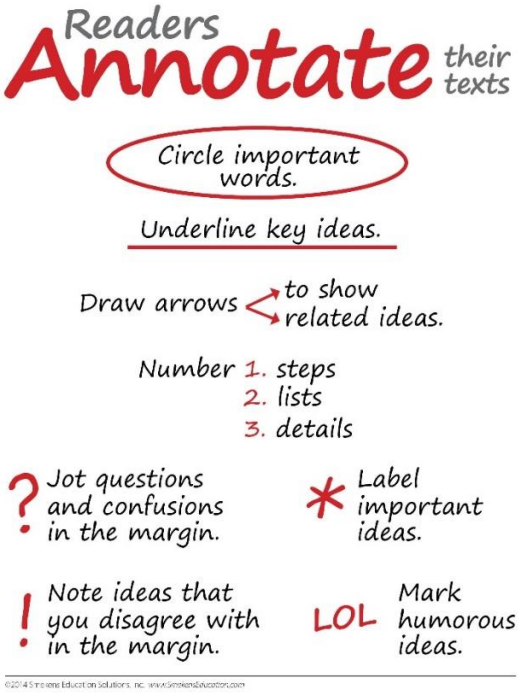
Sample Lesson Plan 1

Class description: **High level class in the whole grade** **Students like learning English and reading in English** **5th grade in an elementary school in Shanghai**	**Setting:** **Text and appendices used from Newsela.com**	**Central focus:** **Close Reading**
Lesson Title: **Opinion: Climate change can't be fought if people don't know what it is**	**Block(s)/Period(s): 2**	**Projected Time:** **120 minutes**

Objectives	
Competencies	Students will be able to complete four multiple choice questions: word meaning and choice, arguments and claims. Students will be able to write what actions you are planning to take related to climate change, and why.
Functional	Students will be able to anticipate content and read to confirm prediction. Students will be able to scan for specific information. Students will be able to express their own ideas and share with peers.
Listening	Students will watch a video about climate change and answer questions.
Reading	Students will read an article about climate change. Students will search and read websites about global climate change.
Writing	Students will write their own opinions and share with peers. Students will write what actions they are planning to take related to climate changes, and explain the reasons.
Vocabulary	adapt, ignore, climate-friendly, independent, Democrat, Republican
Grammatical	Students will correctly use the sentence pattern "It is …to do something.". Students will use correct attributive clause of "who" and object clause.
Teacher' student's knowledge	
Assumptions	The learners need to use computers to search the websites about global climate change. The learners need to write and speak out their own opinion about global climate change. The learners also need to know that there is a long way to make education and climate action work together.

Instructional Plan	
I.- Language used in real-world context	
Purpose	Learn the new vocabulary and know their meanings in the text. Get background information about the global climate change and education. To get a general idea of the text.
Opening/Icebreaker Activity: **Mix and Mingle**	Write questions on strips of paper in advance. Each student gets one. The students stand up to find a partner and discuss questions. Set timer of two minutes for each round, then the students exchange papers and find another discussion partner. The questions are like following: How's the climate in China? Does everyone have good education in the world? How do you think of the climate in tropical countries? What's the difference of the climate between Singapore and Iceland? Do you know global climate change? Is the temperature nowadays going higher than before? The answers vary. Summarize the answers in whole class.
Task 1	Watch the video and write down the key words. Causes and Effects of Climate Change | National Geographic https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G4H1N_yXBiA
Task 2	Watch the video again and discuss with partners. Use the key words written on the paper. The questions for discussion: 1. How much of the world's energy comes from burning fossil fuels? 2. How does the increase in carbon dioxide in ocean water affect marine life? 3. How are hibernating animals affected by global climate change? The questions are on a piece of paper with multiple choices for each student. (see the attached worksheet) After discussion, find out the correct answer. Check the answer with the teacher after watching the video the third time. The answers are: 1. D 2. A 3.C
Fishbowl Activity	1.Set the goal: listen to the peers' conversation intentionally and ask good questions. 2.Question for discuss: What are the causes and effects of climate changes? 3.Choose some students for fishbowl. Observers take notes and go into the fishbowl in turn. 4.After conversation, debrief and set new goal.

Pre-teaching of Vocabulary	Use flashcards and videos to teach the new vocabulary: adapt, ignore, climate-friendly, independent, Democrat, Republican  
Focusing on the language and checking learning. **Game: Password**	Divide the students into two groups and have a competition. One student faces to the board, acts out or describes the word written on the board, but cannot say the word. The other group members guess the word or concept. The new vocabulary must be included in the words written on the board. The group who guesses more correct words wins the game.

II.- Practice in Meaningful Context	
Purpose	To employ critical thinking skills. To collaborate with peers. To practice conflict resolution and negotiation. To know the relationship between education and global climate change.
Reading Activity: **Sticky Notes**	After knowing the background information and pre-teaching of vocabulary, the students have a general idea about the text. Read the text independently. Reread, put "sticky notes" on the parts of text which are: Interesting parts Confusing parts Important parts After rereading, ask and answer questions which are based on the "sticky notes" parts in groups. The questions which cannot get answers will be discussed in the whole class.
Task 1	Complete the worksheet of multiple choices questions. To check the students understanding of the new vocabulary and the text. Check the answer in whole class. The answers are: 1. C 2. C 3.B 4. D
Task 2	Annotating the text individually after showing this picture and telling how to annotate.  https://www.pinterest.com/pin/9007267981829766/

Task 3 **Post-reading activity:** **Debate**	The topic is: Do you think education is related to the global climate change? Divide the students into two groups according to their opinions of pros and cons, search talking points online, write down their argument points, prepare for the debate. Debate and record the scores.
Task 4 **Wrap up:** **Writing about the text**	After debating, the students have deeper understanding about the text. Write your own opinion about what actions you are planning to take related to climate change, and why. The students can also use mind map to complete this assignment.
Assessment	
• There are two kinds of assessment: formative and summative assessment. • In this class, the students' performance in the activities are observed and recorded as the formative assessment grades. • The last project of writing is the summative assessment for this class.	
Extension	This text is related to science, education, biology, geography, economic and environment, which needs the students to have a broad range of background knowledge.
Resources	computer, projector, flashcards, handouts, white board, video online

Appendices

Name: _____

Circle the correct answer according to the video.

1. How much of the world's energy comes from burning fossil fuels?
   A. 20%
   B. 50%
   C. 60%
   D. 80%

2. How does the increase in carbon dioxide in ocean water affect marine life?
   A. It makes the water more acidic.
   B. It makes the water cooler.
   C. It makes the water saltier.
   D. All of the above.

3. How are hibernating animals affected by global climate change?
   A. They have more places to hibernate.
   B. They have more food to store.
   C. They wake up earlier and have less food.
   D. They are not affected by global climate change.

Name: _____

Multiple Choices:

1. Read the sentence from the first paragraph of the section "*New Ideas Should Come From Everywhere*." It will come from people with vastly different views on the world around them. Which answer choice is the BEST definition of "vastly" based on the information in the paragraph?
   A. Cleanly
   B. Friendly
   C. Extremely
   D. Quickly

2. Read the last paragraph of the section "*Lots Of People Don't Know What Climate Change Is*."
   This is especially true for poor communities where they are most affected by crop failures and natural disasters caused by climate change. They must rebuild from scratch after each new catastrophe and have a hard time getting ahead. By understanding that their world is changing – and that the chance of future disasters is increasing – they can learn to adapt to the effects of a changing climate. Which word from the paragraph helps you understand that the natural disasters cause huge problems for people?
   A. Communities
   B. Scratch
   C. Catastrophe
   D. Adapt

3. The author argues that people will benefit from being climate-friendly.
   Which sentence from the article BEST supports this claim?
   A. The Yale study found that the more educated that people are, the more aware they are of climate change.
   B. To take one example, in Niger, education and improved farming techniques helped to double incomes for more than 1 million farmers.
   C. According to the Pew study, almost 7 out of 10 people believe that they would have to make major lifestyle changes.
   D. Fortunately, younger generations today are better educated and more committed to environmentally friendly technology than were previous generations.

4. Which excerpt from the article BEST supports the claim that learning about climate change will help people find ways to stop it?
   A. According to a recent Pew study, 7 out of 10 Americans who are political independents were not very concerned that climate change would hurt them. Political independents do not consider themselves Democrats or Republicans.
   B. This is especially true for poor communities where they are most affected by crop failures and natural disasters caused by climate change. They must rebuild from scratch after each new catastrophe and have a hard time getting ahead.
   C. Still, many people insist that dealing with climate change is too expensive. According to the Pew study, almost 7 out of 10 people believe that they would have to make major lifestyle changes.

D. Finally, education is needed to create new technology to fight climate change. These new technologies include clean and safe energy, climate-friendly agriculture, and smarter cities. More education will lead to more local solutions.

Name: _____

Writing:

After reading this article, what actions are you planning to take related to climate change, and why? If you are not planning to take action, explain why not. Use at least two details from the article or other sources to support your response.

Appendices

By Felipe Calderón, Project Syndicate, adapted by Newsela staff

Published:07/13/2016

https://newsela.com/read/opinion-climate-change-education/id/19361?text_set_ids=198907&collection_id=2000000156&new_ui=true?

Sample Lesson Plan 2

Subject: NCE Book 2 Unit 1 Lesson 3 Please send me a card	**Central Focus:** The Simple Past Tense
Essential Standard/Common Core Objective: The students can make some basic judgement about travelling. They can also use the simple past tense to express things happened in their study and daily life.	**Projected time:** 35 minutes **Students:** the 2th grade in Shanghai China
Daily Lesson Objective: The students will learn how to express things happened in the past and use the simple past tense correctly.	
21st Century Skills: The students will know the relationship between travel and postcards. Foster them a sense of mailing postcards to friends and relatives when they travel.	**Academic Language Demand (Language Function and Vocabulary):** 1. Vocabulary: send, postcard, museum, friendly, waiter, lend. 2. Language Function: Use Simple Past Tense to express things happened before
Prior Knowledge: In Lesson 1 and Lesson 2, there are some sentences of simple past tense in the texts. Students have the first understanding of the simple past tense. Students know how to change the verbs into simple past form.	

Activity	Description of Activities and Setting	Time
1. Focus and Review	Show a short video about travelling and a picture of postcards, warm up with some questions: How do you spend your holidays? Do you like travelling? What do you know about postcards? …	5 mins
2. Statement of Objective for Student	Tell the students if they express what happened before, they need to use Simple Present Tense. Explain the objective today is using simple past tense.	1 min
3. Teacher Input	1. Words learning: Show the pictures of the words, explain and teach the new words. Pay attention to the words with the change of tense: send(sent), lend(lent) 2. Reading the text, find out the simple present tense sentences.	8 mins

	Explain and ask the students to find out the differences between the simple past tense and the simple present tense. From those sentences, the students summarize the grammar rules.	
4. Guided Practice	Change the sentences from Simple Present Tense to Simple Past Tense. The teacher modelled the first one. (I do.) Ask a couple of students to do the next one before the class. (We do.) The students work in pairs to complete the left sentences. (You do.)	10 mins
5. Independent Practice	Play a game: Cut, Glue & Paste! Find out the correct words, cut, then glue and paste in the blanks.	10 mins
6. Assessment Methods of all objectives/skills:	Informal assessment: the game. The students need to choose correct verbs of past tense form to fill in the blanks.	
7. Closure	Ask students what we learned today, summarize.	1 min
8. Assessment Results of all objectives/skills:	The assessment is to check the students whether they mastered the simple past tense or not. After they finish the game, the teacher collects and checks the answer.	

Targeted Students Modifications/Accommodations The students can participate in the game and pick out the words they need. They can use the simple past tense to express things happened before fluently.	**Student/Small Group Modifications/Accommodations** When the students are doing pair work, the higher-level students can help the lower-level students.
Materials/Technology: PowerPoint Slides, postcards, pictures, whiteboard, scissors, glue stick, pencil	
Reflection on lesson: This is a student-oriented class. The teacher's character is a demonstrator, a guider, and a collaborator. There are multiple different language practice activities like questions, collaboration, discussion and so on in this class. The students participate in the class actively.	

Simple Present & Simple Past

Complete the sentences using the verbs in present or past form.

1. I always _____(walk) after dinner. It's relaxing.

2. My friend Tommy _____(arrive) late for the party yesterday.

3. Do you _____(like) cats?

4. Tony _____(use) my new computer last night.

5. The store _____(close) earlier on weekends.

6. Lily _____(save) money to buy a house.

7. The big city _____(be) crowded nowadays.

8. My kids _____(play) video games every day. I don't like that.

9. I always _____(cook) meals for my family.

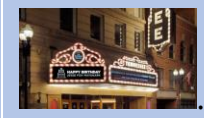
10. Kate _____(send) a letter to Mr. Wang yesterday.

Game: Cut Glue and Paste!

My friend, Roy, _____ last year. He _____me his

and his collection of CDs. Roy _____ a lot of on CDs. He _____

one or two CDs every week. He never _____ to the or to the

 . He _____at home every evening and_____ to music

. He often _____ CDs to his friends. Sometimes they

_____ them. He _____ many CDs in this way.

stay	died	keep	leave
spend	buy	lost	bought
go	stayed	listen	left
listened	lend	die	lent
went	kept	lose	spent

Sample Lesson Plan 3

Content/Subject: English as a second language/NCE Book 1 Lesson 25 Mrs. Smith's Kitchen
Students: low(beginner)/the first grade in elementary school in Shanghai, China
Objectives: SWBAT master the location words: *left, right, middle* and know how to use the prepositions: on the left/right, in the middle of SWBAT verbally use the sentence pattern "*There is*…" to describe a place.

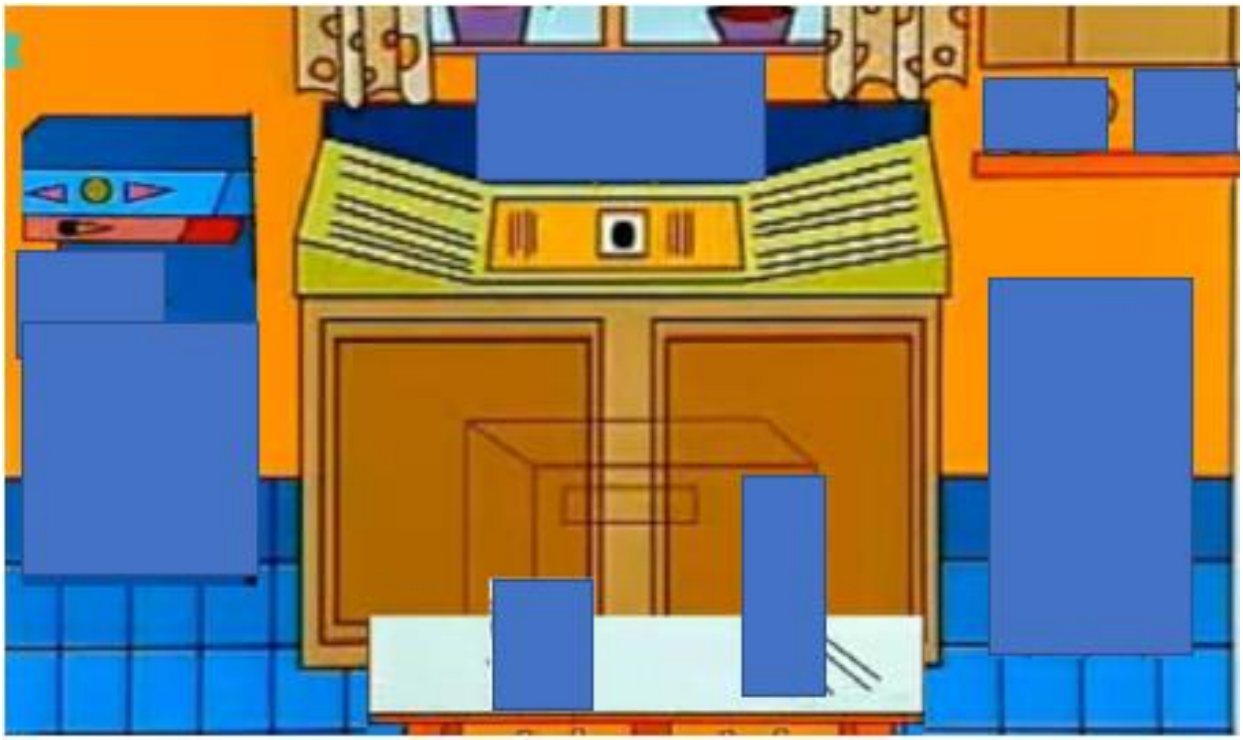
Learning Outcomes: Students can tell the location by using these words: *on the left/ right, in the middle of* Students can describe a place by using the sentence pattern: There is _____ in/on/at _____.	**Academic Vocabulary and Language Demands:** 1. kitchen refrigerator electric cooker right left middle 2. is + single noun phrase
Linguistic Competency (grammatical, pragmatic, discourse, metalinguistic): 1. There is + noun phrase (single)_____ in/on/at _____. 2. Location: left right middle	**Language Supports (sensory/graphic/interactive):** 1. Talk about the pictures. 2. Move the pieces in puzzles 3. Role-play
Materials/Technology: Power Point Slides, pictures, puzzles, handout	

Activity	Description of Activities and Setting (Student Engagement)	Time
1. Warm up	Quick response: Ask: What's in your kitchen? / What can you see in your kitchen? The students answer: *kettle cooker pot table*… Review the words learnt by showing the pictures of different stuff in the kitchen: *Bottle, kettle, tap, table, sink, chair…*	5mins
2. Teacher Input	Teach new words by showing another picture about Mrs. Smith's kitchen. *kitchen refrigerator electric cooker* Describe the kitchen by using the new words.	5mins
3. Guided practice	1.Teach the location words by a game. The game can be played by two rounds. Round I: Practice *right, left* and *middle*. Round II: Practice the phrases: *on the right, on the left, in the middle* **Game:** The teacher says "left", the students put up left hand. The teacher says "right", the students put up right hand. The teacher says "middle", students put both hands on heads. As speed up and up, more and more students fail. The students who keep right till time is up, they win the game. The teacher can also ask some students to give directions. 2.Teach how to describe something in a place by talking about the picture. What is in the picture?	9mins

	This is a kitchen. It is Mrs. Smith's. *There is a cup on the table.* *There is a bottle on the right of the cup.* Look at the pictures and practice the new sentence pattern.	
4. Independent Practice	1. Play a puzzle in pairs. Talk about the moving stuff in the puzzle. Print and cut the puzzle material before class. Play the puzzle with a partner. Move the puzzle pieces, talk and write down the sentences. 2.Group work: Practice, role-play and act out. Make a dialogue about your kitchen.	20mins
5. Closure	Summarize what we learnt today including the new vocabulary and sentence pattern.	1mins
Formative/Summative Assessment	Informal assessment: handout/puzzle Provide multiple forms of students' development of English language proficiency with content-based instruction including listening, speaking, reading and writing.	
Next Steps: We will learn how to describe Mrs. Smith's living room by using the sentence pattern "There are…" which is the plural form of "There is…" in the next lesson.		

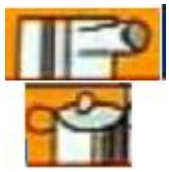
Puzzle

1. Cut and glue the puzzle pieces in correct places of the picture.
2. Ask and answer questions with your partner:
   A: What is on/in the …?
   B: There is a/an _____ on/in the _____.
3. Fill in the blanks.



There is a _____ on the _____ of _____.
There is a _____ in the _____ of _____.
There is a _____ on the _____ of _____.
There is _____.
There is _____.

Cut and Glue!



Chapter 5 Conclusion

Reading comprehension instruction is a very broad area which relates to reading motivation support, reading skills development and reading teaching strategies. Guthrie et al (2004) did several studies about reading comprehension which combined reading motivation support and strategy instruction for third grade children. In both studies, they found that the students in CORI (Concept Oriented Reading Instruction) classrooms were higher than SI (Strategy Instruction) and/or TI (Traditional Instruction) students on measures of reading comprehension, reading motivation and reading strategies. In his study, teachers' motivation support is also as important as strategy instruction. When teachers design lesson plans and perform the activities in class, we should try our best to motivate students. Of course, we cannot abandon strategy instruction at the same time. Educators can use different strategy instruction in class to motivate students and improve their reading comprehension.

In recent years, more and more teachers and parents in China are aware that reading is important for the learners to learn a language, not only a foreign language but also their mother tongue. They start to foster in their students and children the habit of reading when they are very young. It is a good sign that educators have begun to attach importance to reading. However, many of them do not know how to improve learners' reading comprehension. They need to do some research and learn the strategies. It is a good opportunity to provide strategies to Chinese elementary aged students to improve their reading comprehension.

I have worked as a TESOL teacher in China for many years. Many students reflected the difficulties in their English reading comprehension. However, it is not easy to solve the problem from one or two classes. It is a long process to improve their reading comprehension. Since the students start to learn English from elementary school or kindergarten, it is crucial to improve their reading comprehension from the beginning. It made me create this project and write my thesis. From the result of the survey, I found the difficulties in their reading comprehension are from three aspects: close reading, grammar and vocabulary. The three lesson plans I provided are designed and focused from those three areas. They are useful for educators in elementary schools. Parents can also learn strategies from those lesson plans. When they use the strategies, they can combine their own situation with my lesson plans, then get a better solution to improve their teaching and the learners' reading comprehension.

Since we realize the importance of reading in learning a language, we can communicate with more educators and learners, do more research and create more projects to benefit more teachers, parents and students. We can broaden our area of the project like the background knowledge, reading skills, and so on, not just to the three aspects mentioned earlier. More and more people can join in our research and project, and more English learners will benefit from this project.

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